

## **Giardia**

Last Revised: 09/21/2001

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Last Revised: 10/2001

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Giardiasis is an intestinal illness caused by *Giardia lamblia*, a microscopic parasite. The infectious form of the parasite is passed in the stool of an infected individual.

## **Who gets this disease?**

Anyone can get giardiasis. It is very common in child care centers; especially those that have children under age three. It spreads easily among these children to their caretakers and families.

## **How is it spread?**

The most common way a person becomes infected with Giardia in the child care setting is by the fecal-oral route. Eating food contaminated with the parasite may also infect a person. Food may become contaminated when the person preparing the food has giardiasis and has some infected stool on his/her hands because of poor hand washing habits.

Additionally, a person may become infected by drinking water that is contaminated with the parasite. Streams, ponds and springs in New Hampshire are frequently contaminated with *Giardia* parasites. Water can also be contaminated with *Giardia* when sewage enters the drinking water supply.

## **What are the symptoms?**

The most common symptoms of *Giardia* infection are diarrhea, abdominal pain, and cramping and excess gas. There is usually no fever or vomiting. The diarrhea may last up to several months and can cause significant weight loss.

## **How soon do symptoms appear?**

The symptoms appear within 5-25 days or longer. The average incubation period is 7-10 days.

## **Can a person have this disease without knowing it?**

Yes. Some people may have very mild infections that are not serious enough to cause them to go to a doctor. They may not feel sick at all. In some cases of *Giardia* infection,

parasites can be found in the stool from several days to several months after the symptoms have stopped.

## **What is the treatment?**

Several drugs are effective in killing the *Giardia* parasite. Treatment is usually necessary for persons with diarrhea.

How can the spread of this disease be prevented?

1. Wash hands thoroughly after using the toilet *and diapering a child*.
2. Wash hands thoroughly before preparing food.
3. Keep children who have diarrhea at home.
4. Staff with stool positive for *Giardia* should not prepare food or feed children.

## **Who should be excluded?**

Children, staff and food handlers should be excluded while they have diarrhea.

## **Reportable?**

Yes, Giardiasis is reportable by New Hampshire law.